

Passionate, Spirit-Filled Worship

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

I am not sure if any of the churches in Franklin have used it as a marquee sign, but I have seen this message outside multiple churches as they have tried to capture the attention of passers-by and convince them to come inside. Perhaps you have seen the church marquee which reads “Passionate Spirit-Filled Worship.” Doesn’t that sound exciting? Who would not want Spirit-filled, passionate worship? What kind of image does that bring to your mind? Regrettably, we often feel like the person a friend of mine recently e-mailed me about:

“For the past several weeks, Mary Jo has been noticing one of those message billboards that many churches use. This one advertises, ‘Passionate, Spirit-Filled Worship’. Mary Jo is intrigued by the thought that worship could be passionate and filled with spirit. After all, her worship experience usually goes something like this:

“This skirt is too tight for me to breathe – I can’t wait to take it off. I sure hope we finish on time today, because I’ve got a casserole in the oven that’s gonna burn if we go overtime. Oh, no, Brother Kerry is making announcements – he always mutilates the names on the sick list. Well, at least we got one of the good song leaders today. #245? I really don’t like that song and we sing it EVERY Sunday. ‘No Tear Dimmed Eyes’...that was really a sad movie we watched last night. I just cried and cried when that girl’s mother died... Brother Jordan preaches when he prays – if it’s our bonus sermon, I wish he would get on with it. That screaming kid is driving me nuts! All of the guys at the Lord’s table look so nice except Morris – he always looks like he just got out of bed. Now why did they pass the tray that way? It would have been so much easier to pass it the other way. Oh, isn’t that girl cute! She has such pretty curls...oh, wait, that’s a boy! Why do we have to stand up to sing? It’s always too cold in here. That’s the same sermon we had last month. If you two don’t sit still and be quiet I’m gonna take you out! What? Not now! That’s a really neat graphic on that slide – I wonder where he got that. I need to get on the computer and make those birthday invitations today... and I haven’t ordered the cake. I guess I’ve got to go to the store today. Sit still! That boy’s gonna need some new shoes soon. Now that was a good closing prayer – short and sweet! “

No doubt, Mary Jo could use a good dose of passionate, Spirit-filled worship. But what would that really mean? Regrettably, what modern people want and expect (and all too often what modern churches offer) to be passionate, Spirit-filled worship is not at all what God explained as Spirit-filled worship.

Discussion:

- I. What people expect.
 - A. Let’s face it. Like Mary Jo, we face a lot of distractions from worship. Some distractions are external: babies crying, phone’s ringing, children misbehaving, someone clipping their nails, a preacher’s nervous quirks and habits, etc. Some distractions are internal: not enough sleep last night, hunger pangs, football fever, bills to pay, etc. Because of these distractions we often long for a different kind of worship experience. What we want is something *Attention Arresting*. We are certain that if the Spirit were really involved in our worship, He would grab hold of us and not let go. We would zone in on the worship and could not possibly zone out. The singing should be so intense we are struck by every word, the prayers so moving we are right in step with the leader, the Lord’s Supper so striking we cannot help but think about the Lord and the sermon so powerful we sit on the edge of our seats hanging on every word. That is what a lot of people want. Regrettably, that is what a lot of churches try to offer as they move their worship assemblies away from reverence and study to glitz, glamour and entertainment.
 - B. Very few people like the same old, same old. Certainly, worshipping God should never get in a rut. That would be boring. After all, we have to compete with television and the movies that train us to move to something new every 10 seconds. Because of boredom we want a different kind of worship experience. What we want is something *Spiritually Spontaneous*. We are certain that if our worship was passionate and Spirit-filled it would be spur of the moment. Surely we should not have to think about what we are doing. Certainly we should not have to plan it. We are leaving it up to the Spirit to fill us with worship and therefore we are just going to get together

and fly by the seat of our pants, all the while claiming the Spirit is piloting us. Regrettably, that is what a lot of churches try to offer as they move their worship assemblies away from decency and order to spontaneous outbursts, spur of the moment preaching and just basic “get together” conversations handing the floor to anyone who thinks they have something interesting to say.

- C. Finally, when we look at our society, what drives it? Can anyone argue that we are a feelings-driven society? America lives by the motto, “If it feels right, do it.” Because of our feelings we want a different kind of worship experience. What we want is something *Emotionally Electrifying*. We are certain that if worship were passionate and Spirit-filled, shivers and chills would constantly run up and down our spines. We do not want to trust in the presence of God, we want to feel the presence of God. We do not want to think about the sermon, we want to laugh, cry and everything in between. We want gut-wrenching, spine-tingling, heart-rending, earth-shattering emotion so we can feel like we have worshipped. Regrettably, that is what a lot of churches try to offer as they move their worship away from teaching the Bible and honoring God to watching movies, listening to testimonies and reading poetry.

II. “The way it was in Bible times.”

- A. Many people have this picture of passionate, Spirit-filled worship in their minds and you can hear them say, “We want this kind of worship, because we want worship the way it was in Bible times.” That sounds so noble. But here is the rub. That is not the way it was in Bible times.
- B. *Attention Arresting*—Did they have *Attention Arresting* worship? I am sure at times things were going on that were so moving every one was glued to it. Like the time in **Acts 20**, when I am sure everyone was sitting on their edge of their seat because Eutychus fell out of a third story window and Paul brought him back to life. Of course, up to that point, Paul’s passionate, Spirit-filled sermon was so riveting Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of the window. Here is the real deal, Spirit-filled worship was not necessarily *Attention Arresting*.
- C. *Spiritually Spontaneous*—Did they have *Spiritually Spontaneous* worship? Surely they did, after all, they used miraculous gifts and who knew when the Spirit would just take over somebody and they would start talking? Really? That is not the New Testament picture. In fact, not only did they not have “spontaneous” worship, they were commanded not to. According to **I Corinthians 14:40**, worship assemblies were to be conducted properly and in an orderly manner. Here is the interesting thing, this idea that the Spirit just uncontrollably made people speak in tongues or start prophesying is just not biblical. According to **I Corinthians 14:27-28**, when the Spirit gave someone something to speak in tongues, they were supposed to see if there was an interpreter available. If not, they were to remain silent. In **14:29-33**, if God granted revelation to one, he was allowed to speak, but if a revelation was then granted to another, the first was to become silent. Then amazingly, Paul says that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. The Holy Spirit did not make anyone jump up spontaneously and start preaching uncontrollably.
- D. *Emotionally Electrifying*—Did they have *Emotionally Electrifying* worship? I have no doubt that people’s emotions were fired up at times. Let’s face it, considering the Lord’s death is an emotional moment. Hearing about false teaching and rebellion against God evokes feelings. Watching someone confess Christ and be baptized into Him is moving. But was worship about feelings? Here is an amazing thing. I ran a search with my Power Bible program for various forms of the word “feel.” Not one single time does the Bible ever say anything about anyone ever feeling the presence of God. Not one single time does the Bible ever say anything about people feeling like they have really worshipped. In the Bible, worship is about faith, not about feelings. Interestingly, there are only two passages in the Bible that connect “feelings” with “worship.” **Deuteronomy 4:19** (NKJV) is the first and rebukes those who “feel driven” to worship the stars of heaven. The other is **I Samuel 13:12** (NKJV), in which Saul “felt compelled” to offer an unlawful sacrifice. So much for feelings based worship.

III. What God explains (**Ephesians 5:15-21**).

- A. *Personally Circumspect*—In **Ephesians 5:15**, Paul begins this section that deals with Christian living and worship, by pointing out that we must be careful how we walk (NASB). The KJV says, “Walk circumspectly.” That word “circumspectly” means to look (“spect,” like spectacles) around (“circum,” like circumference). In other words, the foundation for passionate, Spirit-filled living

and worship is personal attention. We face distractions; therefore we want something to force us to pay attention. God however says we must be on our guard and pay attention. God will not overwhelm us and make us focus on worship when it is Spirit-filled. Rather, we are passionately worshipping when we are making ourselves focus on Spirit-filled worship.

- B. *Word Governed*—**Ephesians 5:15-21** is the perfect passage for us to study regarding this issue because it commands, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” There it is, that is what we are looking for—Spirit-filled worship.
1. Amazingly enough, many have completely missed the point of this passage thinking it compared being drunk on alcohol and being filled with the Spirit and then came up with that truly awful and unbiblical phrase, “drunk in the Spirit.” Paul was not comparing drinking wine with being filled with the Spirit, he was contrasting them. Drinking alcohol leads to excess, dissipation or lack of self-control. Being filled with the Spirit leads to worship. Not out of control worship, but wise, circumspect, reverent worship.
 2. But what does being filled with the Spirit mean here? Regrettably too many people just latch on to the phrase without trying to Biblically figure out how we go about being filled with the Spirit. After all, this is something Paul is commanding us to do. Instead of filling ourselves with wine, we are to fill ourselves with the Spirit. Note the parallelism of **vs. 17** with **vs. 18**. **Vs. 17** says, “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” **Vs. 18** says, “Do not get drunk with wine..., but be filled with the Spirit.” Getting drunk with wine is foolish, but understanding the will of the Lord is being filled with the Spirit. Further, the parallel passage in **Colossians 3:16** says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” Do you see it? How do we become filled with the Spirit, understanding the will of the Lord? Not by some spontaneous miracle of worship, but by filling our minds with the word of Christ. Spirit-filled worship is not some kind of series of spontaneous emotional outbursts because we just cannot help ourselves in the presence of God. Spirit-filled worship is submitting to God’s will by obeying His word and worshipping His way based on His word. Therefore Paul concluded in **Colossians 3:17**, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” Spirit-filled worship is *Word Governed*.
- C. *God Focused*—Modern expectations are amazingly “me-focused.” I want something to grab me. I want to feel something. I want to receive something. But that is not what biblical passionate, Spirit-filled worship was about. According to **Ephesians 5:19-21**, worship is about submitting to God and fearing Him. Spirit-filled worship is not about us getting anything from God. We have already gotten from God. He gave us His Son, Jesus Christ. Spirit-filled worship is about us giving to Him. Spirit-filled worship is not about us waiting on God to pour something out on us. Spirit-filled worship is about us pouring ourselves out to praise, honor and thank Him.
- D. *Others Oriented*—Once again, we find the self-centered nature of modern worship repudiated by **Ephesians 5:19-21**. Not only is worship to be God Focused, it is also to be *Others Oriented*. We do not gather here to have the brethren do for us. We gather here to do for them. This is not about whether they dress to please us, comb their hair to please us, preach to please us or sing to please us. This is about us giving our all in order to edify others. No doubt, when we worship properly, we will be edified and we will be pleased. But as we worship it is about us helping others and submitting to others in the fear of Christ. That is Spirit-filled worship.

Conclusion:

I want passionate, Spirit-filled worship as much as the next person. But I am not willing to sell out real passionate, Spirit-filled worship for the glitz, glamour and emotional pay off of modern misguided attempts at worship. God has told us what He wants. He does not want emotional outbursts of spontaneous feelings. He wants decent, orderly, circumspect worship. He wants us to pay attention to His word, pouring ourselves out to Him, not because He overwhelms to do so but because we want to honor and thank Him for what He has already done. And He wants us to submit to one another, edifying others instead of expecting all of this to be about me and my feelings. That is passionate-Spirit-filled worship—no matter what it feels like.